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LISTING OF THE CLAIMS

An identifier indicating the status of each claim is provided.

1. (Currently Amended) A business management method comprising the steps of:

obtaining information about earnings and expenses based on expenses incurred by content providers supplying users with recording devices compatible with contents offered by the providers, on content subscription fees paid by said users for receiving said contents, and on earnings derived from services and/or advertisements included in said contents;

determining said services and/or advertisements to be provided to said users based on said users viewing history data;

controlling fees to be paid for said services and/or said advertisements in accordance with said information about said earnings and expenses thus obtained;

judging whether or not ~~it is possible to pay back~~ a share of the earnings possibly may be paid back; and

initiating a process to decide on items applicable to pay back when ~~it is judged~~ that pay back is judged possible.

2. (Original) A business management method according to claim 1, wherein said services constitute electronic commerce practiced by virtual shops.

3. (Previously Presented) A business management method according to claim 1, wherein the share of said earnings is passed on to manufacturers of said recording devices in accordance with said information about said earnings and expenses.

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4. (Original) A business management method according to claim 3, wherein said recording devices are leased free of charge to said users.

5. (Original) A business management method according to claim 1, wherein said content subscription fees paid by said users are controlled based on said information about said earnings and expenses.

6. (Original) A business management method according to claim 1, wherein the business management method further comprises the steps of managing the number of recording devices compatible with said contents provided by said content providers to said users, and determining fees to be paid for said services and/or said advertisements included in said contents in accordance with the managed number of recording devices.

7. (Original) A business management method according to claim 1, wherein said recording devices each include a hard disc drive.

8. (Currently Amended) A business management apparatus comprising:
an information processing element for obtaining information about earnings and expenses obtained based on said expenses incurred by content providers supplying users with recording devices compatible with contents offered by said providers, on content subscription fees paid by said users for receiving said contents, and on said earnings derived from services and/or advertisements included in said contents;

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a first determining element for determining said services and/or advertisements to be provided to said users based on said users viewing history data;

a controlling element for controlling fees to be paid for said services and/or said advertisements in accordance with said information about said earnings and expenses thus obtained;

a judging element for judging whether or not ~~it is possible to pay back~~ a share of the earnings possibly may be paid back; and

an initiating element for initiating a process to decide on items applicable to pay back when ~~it is judged~~ that pay back is judged possible.

9. (Original) A business management apparatus according to claim 8, wherein said services constitute electronic commerce practiced by virtual shops.

10. (Previously Presented) A business management apparatus according to claim 8, wherein said controlling element further allows the share of said earnings to be passed on to manufacturers of said recording devices in accordance with said information about said earnings and expenses.

11. (Previously Presented) A business management apparatus according to claim 8, wherein said controlling element further controls said content subscription fees paid by said users based on said information about said earnings and expenses.

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12. (Previously Presented) A business management apparatus according to claim 8, wherein the business management apparatus further comprises:

a managing element for managing the number of recording devices compatible with said contents provided by said content providers to said users; and

a second determining element for determining fees to be paid for said services and/or said advertisements included in said contents in accordance with the managed number of recording devices.

13. (Currently Amended) A data broadcast delivery method comprising the steps of:
allocating a data broadcast to any unused bandwidth over a broadcast band used by a broadcasting station to broadcast programs;

receiving said data broadcast at a receiving side for storage onto a storage medium in each of a plurality of television sets;

sorting out contents, including services and/or advertisements, in the stored data broadcast;

determining said services and/or advertisements to be provided to users based on said users viewing history data;

operating said plurality of television sets for selective viewing of the sorted-out contents;

judging whether or not ~~it is possible to pay back~~ a share of the earnings possibly may be paid back; and

initiating a process to decide on items applicable to pay back when ~~it is judged~~ that pay back is judged possible.

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14. (Original) A data broadcast delivery method according to claim 13, further comprising the step of:

if a content selected by said receiving side is related to electronic commerce practiced by a virtual shop, then permitting access to said virtual shop associated with the selected content.

15. (Original) A data broadcast delivery method according to claim 13, further comprising the step of storing said data broadcast successively onto said storage medium in such a manner that when a storage capacity of said storage medium either drops below a predetermined level or is completely exhausted, the initially recorded broadcast data are deleted from said storage medium to make room for the most recently received broadcast data.

16. (Original) A data broadcast delivery method according to claim 13, wherein the data broadcast that may be stored onto said storage medium is delivered only to viewers having subscribed to membership in advance.

17. (Original) A data broadcast delivery method according to claim 16, wherein the subscription to said membership is chargeable.

18. (Original) A data broadcast delivery method according to claim 13, wherein said data broadcast includes audio data and video data.

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19. (Currently Amended) A business management method comprising the steps of:

obtaining information about earnings and expenses based on costs incurred by equipment manufacturers supplying users either free of charge or for a fee below cost with recording devices compatible with contents offered by content providers to said users, on content subscription fees paid by said users for receiving said contents, and on earnings derived from services and/or advertisements included in said contents;

determining said services and/or advertisements to be provided to said users based on said users viewing history data; ~~and~~

controlling amounts of money to be paid back to said equipment manufacturers in accordance with said information about said earnings and expenses;

judging whether or not ~~it is possible to pay back~~ a share of the earnings possibly may be paid back; and

initiating a process to decide on items applicable to pay back when ~~it is judged~~ that pay back is judged possible.

20. (Original) A business management method according to claim 19, wherein said business management method further comprises the step of controlling fees to be paid for said services and/or said advertisements in accordance with said information about said earnings and expenses.

21. (Currently Amended) A business management apparatus comprising:

an information processing element for obtaining information about earnings and expenses based on costs incurred by equipment manufacturers supplying users either free of charge or for

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a fee below cost with recording devices compatible with contents offered by content providers to said users, on content subscription fees paid by said users for receiving said contents, and on earnings derived from services and/or advertisements included in said contents;

a determining element for determining said services and/or advertisements to be provided to said users based on said users viewing history data; and

a controlling element for controlling amounts of money to be paid back to said equipment manufacturers in accordance with said information about said earnings and expenses;

a judging element for judging whether or not ~~it is possible to pay back~~ a share of the earnings possibly may be paid back; and

an initiating element for initiating a process to decide on items applicable to pay back when ~~it is judged~~ that pay back is judged possible.

22. (Previously Presented) A business management apparatus according to claim 21, wherein said controlling element further controls fees to be paid for said services and/or said advertisements in accordance with said information about said earnings and expenses.